

R E P O R T
OF CHARLES R. WATSON, PRESIDENT
TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF
THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AT CAIRO
For the Year 1933-34.

Gentlemen:-

As I undertake the presentation of the record of the year 1933-34, the temptation is strong to drop into one of two moods, that of the optimist or that of the pessimist. Perhaps it will be best to allow each of these two gentlemen to speak in turn.

Here is the Report of Mr. Pessimist: "This past year marked the zero hour of the American University at Cairo. It began in an atmosphere of public suspicion toward all missionary work following a summer of the most vitriolic attacks in the Moslem press in Egypt. In these attacks the University was denounced as the brain and head of a widespread plot to overthrow Islam. A few days before College opened, the Sheikh el Islam issued a warning to all Moslem parents that it was an open contravention of Moslem principles to send a Moslem boy to a Christian school. The enrolment of the College dropped from 263 to 178 and the Moslem enrolment from 113 to 80. The bitterness of Moslem attacks affected the Extension Division lectures, and a cordon of criticism availed to reduce attendance upon the lectures given by a Damascus celebrity, Kurd Ali, so that instead of a full house of 1100 auditors as had been expected, the attendance dropped at its lowest point to 103. To these onslaughts from without were added disheartening and demoralizing reductions in the budget of the institution and the weakening of the American staff by the withdrawal of five men out of thirteen. In the College, the budget has been just one half what it was in 1931-32 and some seven classes or grades have been closed out. Yes," says Mr. Pessimist, "the past year is the worst ever and the future holds little hope."

Mr. Optimist speaks in other terms. "The past year", says he, "has indeed been a difficult year for the American University at Cairo, but for what institution or people has the past year been an easy one? Is it not a noteworthy fact that the institution has weathered these gales and that it has not been closed out altogether? To have continued the support and the activities of over forty full time workers, not to count servants and subordinate help, to have kept up a brave front and not to have lost morale, to have avoided every experience of panic and rout and even a defeatist attitude is no small achievement. To have had 178 young lives under our influence in the College for two thirds of a year and 68 other lives in the School of Oriental Studies; to have marshalled some 18,000 people in the meetings of the Division of Extension and to have carried far afield in Egypt and even to Mecca itself higher educational ideals through the Journal of Modern Education -- these are accomplishments that are quite satisfying for so difficult a period. Best of all, to have done creative thinking and reorganization of the highest order in these difficult days and to have witnessed to our Moslem friends a good confession of blameless living and undiminished friendliness is a record that guarantees correspondingly greater success in the easier and calmer and more favorable days that are ahead." Such is the appraisal of Mr. Optimist for 1933-34.

I leave with you both sides of the picture, but wish to share with you three convictions which seem to me to guarantee the permanency of the American University at Cairo. The first is the certainty that the basic need for education will continue in Egypt. We are dealing not in some luxury that society might dispense with, but in one of those fundamental community needs which is bound to continue. It is hard to believe that, given courage, perseverance and creativeness, we could be shut out from the educational market. The second point is our strategic location in the Moslem world. Not unless you picture to yourself the total abandonment of all foreign missionary work in Moslem lands, can you imagine work at so strategic a center as ours and work of such a strategic type as ours being given up. The third consideration is the abiding worth of the Christian message and life. Allow for a thousand adjustments and readjustments in the methods of our approach to the Moslem, in the end you still have values to impart which Islam needs and will want and which are found nowhere else than in Christ. So we may rest assured: this work of ours is secure. Turning from this general survey of broad conditions and trends, I claim your attention for an appraisal of each sector of the work.

1. The College of Arts and Sciences

For the Faculty of the College, I would bespeak the special sympathy and appreciation of the Trustees for the heavy teaching schedules they have carried during the past year in their effort to maintain as many of the classes and activities as could be saved from discontinuance, threatened by the unfortunate coincidence of a falling enrolment and a reduced support from America. By ingenious scheduling of classes and by a careful husbanding of the teaching strength of the staff and by the generous contribution of help from outside the College Faculty, a far stronger program was maintained than at first seemed possible.

Especially worthy of note was the operation of an Adviser System during the past year. "Every student was assigned", reports Dean Galt, "to some member of the staff, both Americans and Egyptians cooperating in the plan. Office hours were posted, interviews held, and monthly report cards distributed personally by advisers rather than impersonally from the Registrar's office. As a result, hundreds of personal contacts that had not hitherto been possible came into existence. No longer was any student able to say that no one paid any personal attention to him. Even if nothing else had been done but distribute the monthly cards through the advisers, this foundation bond of personal interest would have been created. But in addition to the hundreds of contacts resulting from this one feature of the system alone, the advisers' reports record a variety of other definite accomplishments such as discovering the need of glasses and pressing until they were actually secured, helping in the settlement of a personal quarrel, discussing with the girl students their personal problems, improving the study habits of a failing student, advising on the possibilities of foreign study, advising on the problem of masturbation, launching a student in a much needed athletic program, getting a student with very bad teeth into the hands of a dentist, correcting a bad attitude held by a student toward his teachers, helping a maladjusted conservative student, ~~correcting a bad attitude held by a student toward his teachers, helping a maladjusted conservative student,~~ correcting an over-emphasis on sport and love novels, and counselling on problems arising out of the conflict of religion and science." I quote this testimony at length for I believe the feeling of many Trustees will be that one might almost be consoled for a reduced enrolment if it makes possible so rich a contact of student with teacher.